

Chief Executive Officer's Report

Annual Report 2000/2001



I am pleased to present the fourth Annual Report of MacKillop Family Services.

As I write there are very clear signs of the movement of our organisation from that early establishment stage to a much more progressive or developmental focus. Sr Nora's moving poem (see page 5) captures exceedingly well the emergence of the young MacKillop Family Services from the "protective bark" of the founding agencies and our three congregations. We have worked very hard over the last four years to embrace the notion of a refounding of the seven original works. As our new Strategic Plan suggests we have sought to take forward the best characteristics of our founding agencies and have developed a strong recognition of their history and of the story of the founding congregations.

The Strategic Plan also acknowledges that our future is a combination of drawing on our experiences, in the recent and distant past, and engaging the very real challenges which confront our organisation today. There is a clear distinction here between the viability and survival issues which dominated our first three years and the new emphasis emerging in the organisation. In many respects this new emphasis embodies much of the spirit and hopes which we held for MacKillop as we worked towards its establishment in 1997. Perhaps we were too ambitious, that all these hopes might be fulfilled in those first few years nonetheless it is a great sign of encouragement that they can now be actively addressed.

In last year's report I noted, "...if the hope for financial viability can be realised over the next year then the new focus must be on research, evaluation, innovative models of practice and quality assurance systems..." The first two budgets of the Bracks Labor government have witnessed significant additional funding for the provision of residential care for disadvantaged children and young people. These increases have had a very marked and positive influence upon the financial circumstance of MacKillop Family Services.

The impact of the first budget was realised in the 2000/01 financial year, where we have, for the first time, returned a small surplus after what was previously referred to as "abnormal items" are taken into account. It is also pleasing to report that the Board has been able to sign off for the first time a balanced budget for the 2001/02 year based on the second round of funds injected by the State Government. With an expanded budget of nearly \$18 million in 2001/02, we have been able to establish improved staffing arrangements in many residential units as well as contingency funds to cover the crises and unexpected demands which accompany this most challenging work. Whilst we still look forward to new State Government initiatives in the funding of family support and home based care services, we are clearly moving in the right direction.

Early in 2001 the Board agreed to significantly restructure our metropolitan operations, dividing the previous metropolitan region into two smaller regions, namely Western Region and Southern and Specialist Services. The three operational regions of MacKillop – Barwon, Southern and Specialist Services, and Western – now share similar budgets in excess of \$5 million. The resulting organisational structure is both more balanced and flatter, with senior management staff being much closer to the operations in their designated regions. Mr Brian Mitchell moved from the position of Metropolitan Regional Director to that of Regional Director Southern & Specialist Services, and Ms Helen Burt took up the new position of Regional Director Western Region.

The theme of our 1998 Strategic Plan was "... building community..." This new structure will better enable us to reshape our approach to the provision of services around the needs of distinct communities. The challenge will be for us to integrate our specialist service provision in such a way that specialist knowledge is not lost but a more community and family centered approach emerges. Prior to her appointment as Western Region Director, Helen Burt undertook significant research regarding the introduction of a quality assurance framework within the organisation. At the time of writing Helen's recommendations have been embraced within our Strategic Plan, and the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria has put to the sector a particular proposal which we hope to embrace with great energy in 2002.

In this International Year of the Volunteer, I want to especially acknowledge the 300 or more people each week who enable our organisation to deliver its wide array of services. Be they Home Based Carers in Geelong, volunteers in our opportunity shops, those supporting families and individuals through St Anthony's, or caring for children in respite or Specialised Home Based Care placements through St Joseph's, or indeed, members of our Board or the many advisory committees, very few of our program areas or services could be sustained without their substantial and most generous commitment. Our volunteers will often tell us that they receive far more than they give, but I know that without their wonderful enthusiasm and very real skill and success our work would be that much poorer.

Of particular inspiration in the second part of the year has been the Reunions program facilitated by our Heritage and Information Service, often in conjunction with the relevant former residents' association. It has been a powerful experience to stand with men and women in their sixties and seventies and to hear their stories, both the good and the difficult, of their early lives and their time in care. Seeing three generations of the one family walking through the grounds of the old home, visiting the dormitories, bathing areas and recreation areas, is an important reminder of the significance of belonging for our identity and personal story.

Too often we have underplayed the responsibility which organisations carry to sustain and nurture those stories and identities. In recognition of this need to keep the story alive the Board has also commissioned, in conjunction with the three Congregations, the writing of the history of the seven founding agencies through to the foundation of MacKillop Family Services. We are hoping that this substantial work, undertaken by two professional historians, will be completed by mid 2002 and launched at the AGM of that year.

It has been good to continue our involvement with the Sisters of Charity Community Care throughout the last year. John Honner has represented us on the Committee of Management and we have also been able to provide some administrative/payroll support. In a similar spirit of collaboration we entered into a



Covenant agreement with the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart to support their new ministry at Werribee in the establishment of the Corazon Community. Through working together the Sisters have been able to establish a new service for vulnerable families, closely linked with our family support services at St Anthony's. The Catholic Women's League have also entered into partnership with MacKillop, enabling a permanent base for the Mercy Respite Service at Point Lonsdale.

The following pages of this report reveal the human side of much of what we do. There are also stories of the expansion of services, the recognition of excellence through awarding of best practice grants and the careful development of existing and new programs. Alongside this we are also carefully pursuing a capital development program which will see master plans developed for all of our major sites in Barwon and the Western Suburbs. Similarly the construction of the new school and administration office at Maidstone should see us relocating office based staff during term 4, with the school opening fully for students in the new premises from Term 1 of 2002. The future of South Melbourne itself remains

unclear at this stage, but we look forward to significant celebrations in 2002 to mark the many achievements at that site over more than 140 years.

My thanks to my Senior Management Team colleagues for their tireless efforts through another long year. I think all agree that they can now start to see the fruits of their works. My thanks also to the Board of Directors for their unwavering support, even through the most difficult of financial periods, and for their real embrace of the values of the organisation and the spirit of the three founding Congregations.

The contribution of Sr Mary Duffy as the inaugural Chair of the Board of MacKillop Family Services cannot go without mention. Her leadership, vision, capacity to inspire and encourage others and her great belief in our work, have been a source of constant strength to myself and to all who have come to know her. She has encouraged and nurtured the "new Dresden china-like grey blue pink" MacKillop to emerge from underneath, and enabled the fledgling organisation to stand in its own right.

It has been a privilege over the last year to represent MacKillop on the new Council of Catholic Social Services Victoria, in their important role in co-ordinating the diversity of the Church's provision of community services across the State. Similarly the leadership offered to the sector by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria has been very encouraging; their representation to government, new policy development and advocacy regarding funding and quality service provision have created many important opportunities for the sector.

I must also acknowledge the important relationship between MacKillop and the Catholic Education Office. We greatly value their support in our wide range of educational services and their willingness to champion our cause when it would be simpler for some for the circumstance of our young people to be forgotten.

Finally, my thanks to our staff, their commitment to those in our care, their colleagues and our organisation is outstanding.

Paul Linossier
Chief Executive Officer